

EPA Listening Session: Environment and Aging

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Mildred E. Morrison, Administrator
Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging
Department of Human Services
441 Smithfield Street, 2nd FL
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
412/350-4238
mmorrison@county.allegheny.pa.us

It is an honor and most appropriate that the Environmental Protection Agency selected Western Pennsylvania as one of the sites of these six listening sessions as it formulates an agenda around the Environment and Aging. Here we combine the industrial history of the region, the presence of advanced medical care, and high numbers of older adults both affected by and able to effect our environment.

Our understanding and perspective on the environment has evolved

- From the devastating Donora Fog of 1948 when then allowable industrial pollution and a weather inversion caused the death of 20 citizens and the hospitalization of hundreds, to
- The 1960's publication of Silent Spring by Rachel Carson from the Allegheny Valley and educated at Chatham College, to
- The emergence of generational differences in the 1970s as mills were beginning to close with younger people seeking a healthy environment while their elders often observed that "soot on the window sill meant work in the mill" and a certain livelihood.

Allegheny County's Department of Human Services-Area Agency on Aging is pleased that such an initiative is being developed as there is the possibility of long term residual effects on the quality of life as we age and issues that might emerge in later life at a time when many older adults are taking multiple medications. At the same time healthy aging embraces a healthy lifestyle and meaningful purpose in life. There are many ways – great and small that mature adults could contribute to the improvement and sustaining of our environment.

We appreciate the opportunity afforded by the EPA for older adults and those concerned about the effects and possibilities of this generous segment to share their ideas, to be heard, and to hear each other. This will hopefully also serve as an opportunity for those of us sharing this community to hear each other.